



**OBSTACLES TO PUBLISHING AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM**

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**"The** ink of the scholar is more precious than the blood of martyrs"

**THE HOLY PROPHET (PBUH)**

Psychiatrists in academia are required, like all other professionals, to contribute to the existing scientific literature in their field. In addition to ongoing teaching (both undergraduate and post-graduate) and patient service responsibilities, writing and publishing high quality research articlesis arequiredaspectof an academic career.Frequent,highqualitypublicationsarenecessary to sustainandadvanceone'sacademic career. Whilethisapproach hasbeencritfcized foranumber of reasons (e.g. that thepressure to publishscholarly articlesdetracts fromundergraduate or post graduateteaching), researchpublkations remaina core benchmark to measureacademic performancein teaching positions."

In this paper, wereview the challenges facing young faculty members in Pakistan regarding this important issue. Wepointout theobstacles to creating,writingandpublishing highquality researchpapersandsuggest some rationalsolutionsWithinthe existingmedicalsystemof Pakistan.

# THEPROBLfM

Young teaching faculty (either newly hired after a recent post­ graduate degreeor thoseswitching to anacademic careeraftersome years in practice in Pakistan or abroad) often race a daunting obstacle: the requirement to publish frequently and voluminously in order to advance their career and/or obtain tenure (permanent teaching positions).

While the requirements differ amongst various teaching settings (public *vs.*private institutions, provincial vs. federal agencies etc),a youngfaculty member's research andpublication outputremains an

important benchmark for :administrators and departmental and institutionalleaders.

In Pakistan,asin other partsof the world.youngfacultyfacea variety of challenges in accomplishing the goalof becoming well published researchers, These include, but are not limited to, lack of knowledgeable and available research mentors, managing a 'dual career' i.e. teaching in the morning and seeing patients in the afternoons or evenings leaving little time or energy for reading and research,the lack of availability of appropriate 'environments' in their teaching departments (e.g. no emphasis on research at departmental level, no collaborations with other research oriented institutions etc) and perhaps most Importantly, no formal skill or training in creative writingskills.In addition, there is often little or no opportunity in most academic Psychiatry departments in Pakistan to collaborate with senior research faculty in institutions other than theirown.

Additional hindrances In public sector medical institutions include lack of access to scientific databases, lack of basic IT/Computer facilities including uninterrupted access to the internet, lack of protected time available for research and lack of resear<;h mentors whoarewellpublishedauthors.

There is an overall lack of emphasis on research and publication w]th arecent articlepointing out thatPakistan lagsbehind most countries in the region with a very low ratio of medical research productivity: only 8 publications/million population with more than half of this outputcoming fromjusttwo institutions'

If a junior faculty member somehow manages to overcome these obstacles, they arethen facedwith the questionof where to publish. Even within Pakistan, therearedozens of journals, somegeneral and some specialty specific, some Institutional' and others autonomous, making it difficult to decide what the appropriate venue is for one's research and writing efforts. In addition, in spite of the growing arid welcome atmosphere of honesty and tr.msparency in academic circles, thefact remains that it isnot just 'what' one knows but 'who' one knows which can often determine if **a** research publication will see the light of day\_Contacts with senior academicians and well published authors, many of whom are on the editorial boards of research journals are essential to ensure that a research paper gets a fair look. Junior faculty, especially those who have trained outside Pakistan oftendo nothave thisadvantage.

It is an 1,1nfortunate fact that medical school curricula do not emphasize familiarity with research methodology'. Except for some brief exposure to research during one's basic 5Cience classes, it is unlikely that a medical student will learn much (or anything) about researchbefore theygraduate.

Post-Graduate training in Pakistan does include a research component. Fellows of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan are expected to have completed a research dissertation during their training.Similarly,Universities andcolleges offeringpost graduate MD/MS degrees are also increasingly requir1ng the completion of a highquality research project as part of the training. However, for *a* variety of reason, this research experience is unlikely to prepare trainees foranacademic career'



Post-graduate training in the USA and UK offers optional research training for senior post graduate residents in thearea oftheir choice and fellowships in clinical or basic research following completion of post graduate medical training\_ In the USA at least, the majority of doctors from Paklstan donot choose research careers, preferring the comfort andrelatively higher income of asalaried positionorprivate practice.

Thus, most Junior faculty hired as lecturers, demonstrators or Assistant Professors do not have much experience or knowledge of research.

### wmRF CAN \'OlJBEGIN?

The old adage 'you learn something by doing it1 holds crue for research as well.The easiest way to start in research is to finda topic youareinterested in andwritesomethingabout it.

Inorderof ascending level of difficulty (andstronger evidence base), herelsaneasy to follow guide toresearchstudies:

Commentaries, opinionpieces:These are simply your thoughts aboutany subject that you findinteresting\_ If youcanaddsome references for what youare writing, so much thebetter.If well written,thesecanbepublishedin prestigious journals CaseReports:If youseeaninteresting and/orunusualcase,write 11 up!It *does*not need to bea rare oronce1n a life time patient. Even the most common Illnesses can be written up in interesting ways.

Case Series:If youcancollect afew similar cases of anIllness, you canwritelt upasacaseseries.

Observational or Cross Section,1I Studies:These arealso easy to design and implement but for someone completely unfamiliar withresearch, someassistance willbeneeded fromother faculty oradedicated research assistant.

Research beyondthislevelincludes casecontrolstudies,cohort studies, randomized control trials, and systematic reviews/meta-analys.is which usually require a well equipped andwellstaffed research department withspecialized staff.

Literature reviews are another relatively easy option for those unfamiliar with research although the parameters of the search/review need to be well defined to avoid mistakes and exclusions.

#### BASIC ENGLISH AND WRITING SKILLS

Paktstan's undergraduate medicalcurriculum istaughtlnEnglish but the factremains thatmostmedical graduates in Pakistan haveonly a tenuous knowledge of spoken English and their command over written English Is even weaker. Writing and publishing research requires at least a basic familiarity with English writing. There have been cases where a submitted research paper has been rejected or sent forrevision solely onthebasisof unintelligibleEnglish. The best research is useless unless communicated properly. Most journals in theU$andUKarenowoffering affiliated English edltingservices fora fee since most journal editors do not have the time or inclination to correctasubmitted paper'slanguage'.

If your English writing skills are weak, consider taking a remedial course in person or on-line. As mentioned above, the only way to learn to write good Engllsh is to do it. Practice is the key. Write, re-

write, have someone read/critique it, then re-write again. Your skills willimprove slowlybutsurely over time,

**WHICH JOURNAL SHOULD YOlJ SlJRMIT \'OUR**

### l'APCI{ TO!

Logically, you should begin by submitting your first one or two papers ro the journal ofyourmother institution or your professional association (if available). Theadvantage of alocaljournalis that you may already know, or know of, the people running the journal (through professional meetings, conferences, lectures,seminars etc) making it easier to follow up. The next step up would be an institutional journal outside your homecity.This requires your paper to be well researched and well written in order to pass the Chief Editor's 'firstlook',If theEditorlikes thepaper,only thenwillit besi;nt forexternal peer-review, thenextstepin the process.

Junior faculty trained abroad, who may already have menrors or contacts in the country in which they trained, can send their initial publications to thosecountries through their mentors or colleagues. Papers sent to Journals especially those in technically advanced countries (USA, UK, Canada, Japan etc) where you have no contacts

run the risk of being summarily rejected, usually because each journal has a specific niche andspecific policies about what kind of research articles they willentertainbasedontheireditorial policies.

Ir isusually notadvisable for junior faculty trained in Pakistan to send their papers to foreign journals unless invited to doso or unless they canfind*a*researchcollaboratororcolleagueabroad whocan assist.

#### JOURNAL RECOGNITION ANO RANKINGS

There are thousands of journals currently published all over the world\_ Even within Pakistan, dozens of medical journals are published each year.Beforeyousubmit yourpaper,assess thequality andranking of ajournaltoensure thebestimpactforyour work.

Any journal you submit to must be recognized by the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) arid/or the Higher Education Commission(HEC). Check the journal's standing with the PMDC beforeyousubmit yourwork'

Papers published in PMDC recognized Journals are eligible to be counted for promotions for faculty serving In the Basic Pay Scale (BPS) system as well as for recognition of previous teaching/academicexperience.

HEC uses a more rigorous system of 'ranking' journals according to their scientific and editorial content. In addition to recognizing/ listingjournals, HEC also ranks journalsintocategories withjournals having an 'Impact Factor' ranked at the top\_ 'Impact Factor' (IF) is an intemarlonal measure of a journals relative importance within its field'. It reflects the average number of citations to recent articles published in thejournal. HEC ranks non-impact factor journals lower in its listing. HEC has also established its own rules for matching journalpublications to academic appointments/promotions'.

HEC started its'Tenure Track' faculty recruitment systemclose toten yearsago.Thissystem is nowbetng steadily Implemented In medical institutions (in addition to other disciplines like Agriculture, Engineering, Law etc) and is serving a,s a healthy antidote to the traditional BPS/Public ServiceCommissionsystem.The'Tenure Track' faculty hiring system is 'performance-based' withsignificant built-in incentives for excellencein researchand' teaching.HEC envisionsthis

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system as eventually replacing the old BPS system although that transition may be some years away. However, for junior faculty just starting their careers,it isagoodidea to atleast study thepublication requirements of theTISsystemto motivatethemselves.

## TAKE HOME MESSAGE:

As soon as you are hired as an academic faculty member, start writing. Write about anything that imerem you and get your seniorcolleagues to readandcritiqueIt. Keep writing.

Learn basic research by reading books and onllne. Many US

universitiesofferfreeresearchcoursesonline.

Start reading the research literature and learn to use scientific search engines (Google Scholar, PubMed). Organize and lead Journal clubs for medical students, house officers and post graduate residents.

Attend medical conferences to network with research

colleagues. If your own institution **hasa**research journal, apply to its editorial board. Editors are always looking for help and It willmake yourownsubmissions easier.

Start with Commentaries andCase Reports and work your way

up.

Don'tbediscouraged if your first few submissionsaresummarily rejected. Remember what the famous American inventor Thomas Edison said "Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration",

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